

A NIGHT WITH A MOUNTED POLICEMAN

The Adventures of a Sunday Times Representative, Who Accompanied On Horseback One of the Men Who Patrol the Lonely Outlying Sections of the City Between Sunset and Daylight.

It is 10 o'clock at night. Outside the wind is sweeping in gale-like gusts around the corners of the house. Now and then there are penetrating showers of rain, which grow more and more frequent, until a steady downpour is heard on the roof. The fire burning in the grate serves the double purpose of giving an atmosphere of cheeriness to the room and dispelling the early spring rawness in the air. How comfortable it is to sit in your own home and read for an hour or more before the sound of the falling rain gives you an irresistible invitation to go to sleep!

The sound of a horseman passing the house is dimly heard. You step to the window to see who could have chosen such a night for a journey on horseback, and through the rain you recognize that the rider wears a helmet. Oh, it is only a mounted policeman, and you return to your fireside and resume your story.

Only a mounted policeman! How many ever stop to think what this guardian of the peace undergoes in his round of duties between the hours of sunset and dawn? Does it ever occur to the residents in the outlying districts of the city how much they owe to this horseman who is continually on the move while all law-abiding citizens of the neighborhood are supposed to be asleep, and when only the human birds of prey are prowling in dark corners awaiting an opportunity to loot some house?

Not a Sinecure.

But when the air is biting and the rain comes down in sheets; when the wind blows his rubber cape over his head and the water drips off his helmet down his back, his work is not a succession of enjoyable evening rides. It is on occasions like these that the people in his precinct do not see him, not because he is not to be found on his accustomed round of duties, but because they retire to their firesides in winter, and indoors to escape the dampness in the spring.

To be a mounted policeman for one night would be a comparatively pleasant occupation provided the weather were propitious and the law breakers kept within the bounds of the statutes. But such a combination of happy circumstances seldom falls to the lot of the mounted police of Washington. It is a novel sensation to spend a night on horseback following the police.

In the Tenth precinct there is a "beat" on which something exciting takes place on an average of six nights in the week. It was on this beat that a Sunday Times man spent a night on horseback in order to present the facts as they actually exist.

The officer for the early part of the night goes on duty at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. He reports at the station on the hour, and then rides leisurely out to make his rounds. On this particular night the officer was mounted on a powerful horse well able to carry the large-bodied, muscular figure seated in the saddle. The policeman, accoutred with riding boots, and helmet, with a large rubber cape thrown across the horn of his saddle, carried his club and a revolver. As night drew on he slowly paced out Brightwood avenue toward Takoma. Every hour he is supposed to send in his report to headquarters. The police telephone booths are distributed throughout his section, seldom more than a mile or two apart. He is required to report between ten minutes of and ten minutes after the hour at some one of these booths in order that the sergeant in charge of the precinct may be advised as to the whereabouts of all his men. Unless there is some disturbance in a certain vicinity a mounted policeman is not allowed



to send in a report from the same booth twice in succession.

As he neared the District line on the Brightwood road he went to one of the boxes, which resembles a miniature sentry box. Taking down the receiver, he gave his name and the number of his station. These reports are automatically registered at headquarters.

Finally he reached Takoma, and from there to Brookland the ride was through an unusually tame stretch of woods. At places there were no lights whatever, and as the heavens were clouded over the road was hidden from view for the greater part of the time. While riding slowly down a hill a loud halloo startled horses and horsemen. They came to a halt, then drew to the side of the road to await a repetition of the noise in order that the officer might determine the exact direction from which it came. Again it was repeated, nearer and to the rear. All noises in a lonely part of the woods at night produce a weird impression on one who is listening and looking for an outbreak and it was the case here. The mounted police must always be expecting trouble at every hand, for it is the only way that he can be prepared when the time comes

for quick action. In a moment, out of the gloom a horse and buggy were descried coming down the hill at breakneck speed, while the occupants lashed the horse to further efforts. Instantly there flashed through the mind of the novice the possibility of kidnapping party, or of robbers trying to get away with their booty. The policeman sat on his horse on the other side of the road, a monument of imperturbability. As the buggy reached a point almost opposite the man of the law it was seen that the occupants were only three country youths, who were either out for a night's lark or else had been imbibing too frequently. "Here, you boys, quiet down a little!" "A-I-I right, sir," came back feebly from the shadows which had enveloped them, and the policeman continued his way, reaching in due time the big terra cotta works which sent out a cheerful glare from their red hot kilns. Passing on the gloom seemed even more depressing as the woods again enveloped the riders.

The officer instead of taking the regular highway toward Brookland turned his horse into a narrow dirt road used only by the truck farmers. There are a number of houses scattered through this section and he explained that he frequently takes this route because it gives the occupants of this outlying territory a sense of security to know that now and then during the night an officer of the law is passing in front of or behind their homes to see if there are any skulking thieves hidden in the shadows.

"Dead Man's Hollow."

Very little ever happens during the early hours of the night. He had stopped at various boxes on his trip, sending in his reports, and now it was nearly midnight. On his way back to the Tenth precinct station he turned into the gate of the Soldiers' Home ground. It was a long, beautiful ride beneath the trees which form a perfect canopy over the macadamized roadway. The horses were allowed to walk and their hoof beats scarcely broke the silence of the night. It was approaching the witching hour and conversation had lagged. Suddenly the officer seemed to wake from a reverie and he stated that in a few moments the two would be passing through "Dead Man's Hollow," that section of the grounds which most of the old soldiers visit when they

are contemplating suicide. Many tragedies have been enacted in that little hollow, and as a consequence numerous weird tales are told about the spirits that flicker through the trees at the midnight hour. There was no tremor, but a kind of awe in the policeman's voice as he told of a fellow-officer who had declared that on one occasion he had distinctly heard chains rattling behind him as he rode rapidly through that part of the woods. Finally the hollow was reached. The myriad lights of the filtration plant were dancing to the rear on the left, while in front the waving branches of the trees caused the solitary gas lamp to appear to move up and down like a shifting Jack O' Lantern.

As the two approached the station another horseman was seen approaching the first officer. It was the new watch, ready to take up the duties of the night. He had just received notice that there had been a serious affray out on the Brightwood road, in front of a saloon.

After imparting this bit of information the new officer of the watch put spurs to his horse, and the Times man, who wished to know how a mounted policeman spends the night, followed suit. As the two reached Brightwood avenue, still some dis-

tance from the scene of the disturbance, two men appeared on the roadside, walking in the direction of the city. The officer knew them, and inquired as to the trouble. They had learned that a white man had been badly cut, and that he had been taken to the hospital on a car. When only a few hundred yards from the scene of the brawl a group of men were met, who declared that the assailant was a colored man, and that his attack had been unprovoked. The latter had been seen going down the road toward Washington, in company with two other colored men of the neighborhood.

Attacked With Knife.

When the officer reached the spot where the difficulty had taken place it was quite evident that the affair had been more serious than was supposed to be the case at the police station. There were blood stains on the ground several feet in diameter. Inquiry at the saloon elicited the fact that the assault had been wholly unwarranted. The white man had been standing on the outside of the saloon when the intoxicated colored man stumbled out. He immediately made a rush for the white man and cut him severely about the throat, then made off down the road, while

DUTIES OF THE MOUNTED OFFICER

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the few men who had witnessed the attack were too much astonished to interfere. They had given the white man immediate assistance, and in this way the man who had caused the trouble had been allowed to get away.

The officer had no clue on which to work except the fact that his man had started in the direction of Washington, and that he had been joined by two well-known characters of the neighborhood.

The interested onlooker was curious to know just what steps the officer would take in order to capture his man. It was now considerably after 12, and the man guilty of the murderous assault had had an opportunity to cover some distance. This fact did not seem to trouble the officer, however. He had heard that the man had been drinking heavily, and this fact was sufficient assurance to him that the criminal would not be very far distant from the scene of his assault.

The first thing the officer did was to ascertain from persons in the neighborhood where the two men who had been seen with the fugitive were employed. They were day laborers on a farm in the vicinity, and usually slept in a hayloft on the premises. When he learned this fact the brow of the officer cleared quickly. All hesitation seemed to be banished. He went to a box opposite the Brightwood Hotel and secured a lantern.

Landed His Man.

Having lighted this, he made his way to the barn, and without a moment's hesitation, mounted the rather shaky stairway leading to the hayloft. It seemed a rather risky move to make, when it was remembered that the man for whom he was searching had only a short time before nearly succeeded in committing murder. These are points which an officer who knows his duty seldom takes into consideration, however. He is supposed to capture criminals, and all other ideas are of no importance. Before reaching the top of the stairs the deep, regular breathing of two or three sleepers was to be heard. Very quietly, the officer stepped into the loft, holding his lantern high above his head. It was quite apparent now that there was no danger of an attack.

In a corner of the loft, on a pile of straw, lay three men, all fast asleep. The officer stepped quickly forward and grasped the collar of the man lying in the middle. His coat sleeve was covered with blood and his face was also smeared. The man made a feeble denial for a few moments but he was hurriedly taken to the station, and his two companions were enrolled as witnesses in the case. The subsequent trial and conviction of the man are not matters concerning this particular night with the mounted police, but the manner in which the officer had conducted his search added another page to his excellent record.

It was now almost daybreak and while the officer would not be relieved from duty until 8 o'clock, his work as a guardian of the peace while others slept was virtually at an end.

It was not a very strenuous night, as nights with the mounted police are accounted, but there was sufficient variety in it to heighten the Times man's respect for the men who comprise this seldom thought of but very essential branch of the public service of the Capital City.

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